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## Entrepreneurship Skills: one key to successful futures

Judging from the agenda, you'd assume the meeting included board members from a multi-national corporation. There were discussions about financial statements, sales projections, and plans for web site development. You might be surprised to discover that the decisions were being made by high school students, all of whom are participating in a 4-H entrepreneurship club called YBA Enterprises.

The club, which meets in the Novi/Farmington Hills area, is one of several in Oakland County that is creating real business ventures as a means of building a wide variety of skills. For the YBA participants, selling custom-designed, screen-printed apparel and promotional items is a key activity.

Being in an entrepreneurship club is just one of many ways 4-H'ers are demonstrating marketable skills and business smarts. The Tail Waggers K-9 4-H Club of Auburn Hills used networking and face-to-face demonstrations to create a service project in collecting enough cash, food and supplies to support the Michigan Animal Rescue League for several months. Many other clubs have created unique fundraisers to support their activities, learning a lot about supply costs, marketing strategies, and financial management along the way.

Those skills have been linked to positive, life-long outcomes for youth. The Aspen Institute reports that high school students who participate in entrepreneurship activities have clearer occupational aspirations, increase their interest in going to college, and demonstrate leadership behaviors at much higher rates than their non-involved peers.

One recent evaluation of entrepreneurship program participants revealed that, within six months of high school graduation:

- **33 percent were running a small business;**
- **63 percent were employed; and**
- **70 percent were attending college.**

Austin Parsons, a 16 year-old member of the YBA Enterprises 4-H Club says that the program helped him develop "strong leadership skills," adding that, "I am much better at leading my peers in group activities, and have seen a dramatic increase in personal confidence."

For some young people, entrepreneurial activities spawn other business ventures. In Bloomfield Hills, alternative high school students at the Bowers School Farm set a goal of creating a gourmet mushroom-growing business, after attending MSU Extension's "Cultivation of Shiitake and other Specialty Mushrooms Conference." To raise capital for the necessary equipment and supplies, the young people created and sold evergreen wreaths during the 2009 holiday season.

As Michigan re-invents its economy, these young leaders have the skills to develop innovative businesses, tackle challenges with technology, and create jobs.

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## Do healthier moms breastfeed longer?

Infant mortality is a serious issue in Pontiac. According to the Michigan Department of Community Health, the city has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the state.

Research has shown that breastfeeding infants for at least six months is one way to help combat the problem. Oakland County MSU Extension Breastfeeding Initiative (BFI) educator Saneya Hamler observed that nursing mothers who stopped breastfeeding before the six-month recommended duration seemed to consume less fluid than those who continued to nurse their babies for at least six months. She also observed that those mothers who stopped early seemed to frequently report their reason as not having enough milk to satisfy their infants.

With these observations in mind, Hamler designed an educational program using support groups to increase breastfeeding duration by teaching mothers about nutrition and fluid consumption. The groups provided opportunities for members to learn about nutrition, share positive and negative breastfeeding experiences and encourage one another.



Support group member Fabiola and her son Diego.

Two BFI peer instructors each organized a support group in Pontiac. In one group, the mothers' primary language was Spanish and in the other group the mothers' primary language was English.

Instructors gave each mom a 16-ounce container and instructed her to fill the container with water and consume it every time they breastfed their babies.

All of the participating mothers completed a survey before the support meetings began. It included questions about their specific food and fluid consumption during a 24-hour period, their intended duration for breastfeeding and their attitudes toward the importance of eating a healthy diet while breastfeeding.

Survey results revealed the following:

- All ate the recommended three or four meals per day
- Six of seven ate at least one serving of dairy products per day
- Spanish-speaking moms ate significantly more carbohydrates than English-speaking moms
- None drank fluids during breastfeeding
- All said their diets were very important while nursing
- When asked about how long they planned to breastfeed their babies one said that her baby will decide; two said three to six months; four said two years.

The survey will be repeated in May to see if any changes have occurred in the mothers' diets and to determine how instruction might be improved.

A follow-up survey will be conducted in September to determine the actual duration of breastfeeding for each mother. Outcomes for support group members will be compared to outcomes for clientele who did not choose to participate in a support group.

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